

edward johnson building
faculty of music
university of toronto



THE ORFORD STRING QUARTET

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

PRESENT AN ALL-BEETHOVEN PROGRAM

SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 1984

WALTER HALL

8 P.M.

PROGRAM

Quartet No. 3 in D major, Op. 18,

no. 3 (before 1800)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro - Maggiore

Presto

At the beginning of the nineteenth century few music publishers would consider a single string quartet a viable commercial proposition. Symphonies and concertos might be presented to the public in this fashion, graced with their own opus number, but a composer wishing to offer quartets for sale had to be prepared to supply them in groups, usually of three to six. Beethoven's Op. 18 quartets thus appeared in two sets of three, published by the Viennese firm of Mollo. A correspondent of the Leipzig journal, the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, reported briefly in the August 1801 issue that among recent publications issued in Vienna were some splendid works by Beethoven; "three of the quartets give conclusive proof of his artistry but they need to be played often and well for they are difficult to perform and far from popular". This anonymous writer might have said, with more justification, that they were not written to pander to popular taste: it is clear that Beethoven did not address himself lightly to the composition of his first quartets.

The order of the quartets as published (and as they are now numbered) does not reflect the order of composition and Marion Scott has suggested that the most impressive works were chosen to head the two sets. This perhaps explains the relegation of the D major quartet (actually the first to be completed) to the third position, and certainly the appearance of the C minor quartet as the first work in the second set bears out this hypothesis since it is without doubt the most forceful of the six works. In following this particular train of thought we might conclude that Beethoven had certain reservations about the quality of the D major work, but it seems more likely that he was aware that its subdued nature ill fitted it for placement at the beginning of the complete opus.

Quartet No. 3 in D major, Op. 18, no. 3 (cont.)

The first movement is expansive in design, a fact which one could reasonably guess from a first hearing of the spacious opening melody. After such a beginning it is not surprising to discover that Beethoven concerned himself more with maintaining a sense of continuity than with problems of contrast. Contrasts there are but they are deliberately minimized in the interests of greater coherence and this coherence is carried over into the development section. This is deliberately uneventful, concentrating rather on creating a sense of purposeful motion and allowing the broad articulation of the movement to be perceived without difficulty by the listener. The second movement is close to a rondo in design although the return of the opening lyric theme (a particularly happy invention) with its luxuriantly scored accompaniment is varied each time. The scherzo does little to disturb the mood set up by the two preceding movements so that the sense of the continuity extends throughout the whole composition.

Beethoven left extensive sketches for many of his compositions and the existence of successive drafts of a particular movement can often allow us the unique opportunity of watching the composer at work. Without recourse to musical examples it is impossible to demonstrate this evolutionary process but it is worth pointing out that the initial concept of some of Beethoven's germinal themes is unbelievably commonplace, at times even banal. The main theme of the Presto of this quartet is a case in point; the 6/8 metre and the driving rhythm of the final version are already present in the earliest sketches but that is about all. Had Beethoven continued with this first idea the Leipzig journal might have reported differently about the popularity of the quartet; however, it is doubtful whether today we would have the patience to sit through anything so conventional and uninspired. As it is this is probably the strongest movement of the quartet and moreover one which provides the greatest contrast with the style of the remainder of the work. Even here Beethoven seems obsessed with the idea of coherence and the texture of the coda produces the faintest reminiscence of the opening movement, a subtle resonance which helps to integrate this boisterous conclusion into the subdued world of this whole quartet.

- John Mayo

Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95 "serioso" (1810)

Allegro con brio

Allegretto ma non troppo

Allegro assai vivace ma serioso

Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato

Composed in 1810, about a year after the relatively accessible Op. 74, the *quartetto serioso*, Op. 95, puts Beethoven in the role of strongman. Practically every page of the score shows him avoiding the easy and the predictable - indeed, avoiding what the age of Haydn and Mozart called good taste. Instead, we hear him forcing the musical materials to conform to his will. The result is quintessential Beethoven: vigorous, demonic, surging, wrenching. It is also a work that responds poorly to thematic analysis, as Beethoven seems more concerned with textures, harmonies, and key areas.

The characteristic gesture of the piece is a wrenching one: like Atlas changing his grip, Beethoven forces the tonal centre up a half-step. Now it is a curious fact that adjacent notes (say, e and f) present one of the simplest, most obvious relationships, but adjacent chords or keys (say, E major and F major) are very difficult to reconcile in tonal music. Of course, Beethoven has fallen partial victim to the world he helped spawn: his powerful device has become commonplace to those assaulted by it in the works of subsequent composers, good and bad. (When Otello breaks up the brawl, asserting his power by lifting an F-sharp chord to G singlehandedly, his gesture is dramatically perfect, but neither new nor rare). But it is surprisingly easy to recapture the innocence that Beethoven shocked with his muscular modulations.

The first movement immediately sets the rules: the opening idea, in octaves, presents both food for thought (and action!) in its bottom d-flat, c, d-natural, but also establishes the characteristic sound of "unison" swirling scales that will return at Beethoven's most imperious moments. After an angular double-dotted "response" subsides, the 'cello bursts back in, not on the expected tonic, but one half-step higher, on the "Neapolitan". (The fact of a Neapolitan second statement is not revolutionary itself - the "Appassionata" sonata and the second Razoumovsky quartet begin with similar juxtapositions and indeed let the re-

relationship colour their first movements. What is special about this quartet is the force, the brutality of this and other juxtapositions. We are not being led; we are being dragged.) After this Neapolitan has given way to a series of landings on the dominant, C, and Beethoven has impressed the C upon us with swirling *fortissimo* unison scales, he presents, quietly, his second subject - not in C, but in its Neapolitan, D-flat! As if that weren't assertion enough, he interrupts that presentation with *fortissimo* unison scales, eventually on D-flat's Neapolitan, but first on the Neapolitan of its dominant! As implied already, what is more remarkable than the existence of these assertions, and the complex of tonal and harmonic relationships they establish, is, first, their demonic effect, and secondly, the amazing integration of small-scale (motivic, thematic) and large-scale (harmonic, tonal) patterns in this movement - in fact, in this quartet.

The second movement, an *allegretto ma non troppo* "slow" movement, presents two kinds of material: AB(A)BACoda, where B is a very expressive chromatic fugue, "(A)" is a reminiscence of the opening cello scale between the two fugue sections, and the Coda presents a combination of A and B. The key of the movement, D major, is very far from F, and sets up the simple shock at the start and the elaborate link to the third movement at the end.

Beethoven connects these two movements, without pause, by building chords around the note D, arriving at one very memorable diminished chord, which will return. But this chord gets him not to f minor, but only to c minor, so he presents the first section twice, in the tonic only the *second* time! As this pseudo-scherzo (*ma serio*) with two trios unfolds, it develops that the first "trio" or B section will end in D major, like the second movement, giving Beethoven the chance to use the same powerful built-in transition. At the end of the following "scherzo" or A section, he follows the final cadence with that same diminished chord still again, but this time to lead "backwards", from f to D, the starting key of the second B section. This use of a single chord - and it is quite a recognizable *objet sonore* - in so many different contexts tends to mitigate the fact that Beethoven is rewriting the rules of tonality as he goes along, and with the same sort of bullheaded determination that characterized the first movement.

It has not been possible to mention all the half-step, "Neapolitan" relationships, although they are mostly prominent enough. But

Beethoven leaves us no choice in the finale. First, the viola colours the opening with its expressive c, d-flat, c. Next, the first violin's high d-flat, b, c would be striking even without the eerie doubling by the second violin. Third, the tune of the *allegretto* keeps those notes resonating until all four instruments, *fortissimo*, wrench their c's up to d-flats. This relationship becomes especially poignant toward the end of the *allegretto*, after the theme has dissolved, and before the F-major, *Allegro* "happy ending" puts this rising chromatic motion in a comforting if not innocent setting.

- Norman Rubin

INTERMISSION

Quartet No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131 (1826)

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo

Allegro molto vivace

Allegro moderato - Adagio

Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile

Presto

Adagio quasi un poco andante

Allegro

The climactic uniqueness of the five string quartets composed by Beethoven during the last years of his life has frequently been emphasized. An attempt to make any comparative value judgement among these works is hardly appropriate because it is bound to be more or less subjective; nevertheless, there seems to be some substance to the claim that the C# minor quartet stands out in dramatic expressiveness. A dynamic and profound diversification and exploitation of small motivic cells within the boundaries of extreme concentration and concision contribute to maintain the listener's intense interest throughout the lengthy work.

The score indicates no less than seven numbered movements; it should be noted, however, that No. 3 represents merely a short recitative-like introduction to the subsequent variation section, while the twenty eight measures of No. 6, marked Adagio quasi un poco Andante, effectively prepare the Allegro movement of the Finale.

The use of a wide range of artfully combined keys distributed throughout the whole work was viewed by Beethoven's contemporaries as a bold innovation. Today we may still be able to

Quartet No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131 (cont.)

appreciate, for example, the surprising change from C# minor to D major at the beginning of the second movement, although our more or less considerable exposure to such phenomena as modulatory chromaticism and atonality seems to have mitigated to a certain extent our sensitivity to key relations.

It is safe to assume that an audience faced with such a complex and demanding work as the quartet under discussion will approach the music with widely differing attitudes. Some listeners will be mainly interested in the structural aspects of the composition; possibly armed with a miniature score, they will enjoy recognizing such features as the following:

No. 1, marked *Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo*, represents a free fugue. The theme is melodically, (implied) harmonically, rhythmically, and dynamically well profiled. It centres upon the dominant G# which serves at the beginning as the basis of the "up-flexure" G#-B#-C#-A-G# and at the end as the basis of the 'down-flexure' G#-F#-E-F#-G#. These two figures are welded by the overlapping inner "pendulum" A-G#-F#-A-G#-F# into a coherent melodic line. In a regular exposition each of the four instruments enters at a distance of four 2/2 measures to join in a polyphonic interplay gradually intensifying until it resolves into a long sustained tonic triad.

Sharply contrasting with the first movement is No. 2; there the *Adagio* is succeeded by an *Allegro molto vivace*, the key and mode of C# minor by D major, the polyphonic texture by an essentially homophonic one, and the 2/2 by a 6/8 metre serving as a framework for extended commetric alternations between quarter and eighth notes. Within this pattern occur occasionally groupings of contrasting forte and piano measures and, more conspicuously, a sequence of harmonic frictions coupled with *sforzati* placed contra-metrically on the second halves of consecutive 6/8 measures.

In a similar vein our hypothetical analytically-minded listeners will attempt (after a brief acquaintance with the aforementioned recitative-like No. 3) to trace the ingenuous transformations of the main theme unfolding in the Theme-and-Variation Movement No. 4. Turning to the Presto Movement No. 5, they might be tempted to investigate the opposition between the straightforwardness and

Quartet No. 14 in C sharp minor, op. 131 (cont.)

almost folk-like texture of this Scherzo with the subtle refinement of the preceding variations. And hopefully encouraged by the relatively unproblematic nature of the Presto they might try to penetrate the complex structural edifice of the crowning Finale.

To another type of listeners the music will serve as a vehicle evoking a string of emotions and emotionally charged programmatic images. At first sight one might be inclined to associate such listeners with music lovers rather than with professional musicians. That this evaluation is, however, not at all justified, is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by Richard Wagner's interpretation of the work. On the occasion of a performance of the quartet in Zurich he wrote in December 1854 a short introduction in which he characterized the different movements as follows:

Adagio: Schwernütige Morgenandacht eines tiefleidenden Gemütes. (Melancholic morning devotion of a profoundly suffering soul.)

Allegro: Anmutige Erscheinung, neue Sehnsucht zum Leben erwecken. (Graceful vision, inspiring new longing for life.)

Theme and Variations: Reiz, Milde, Verlangen, Liebe. (Charm, gentleness, desire, love.)

Scherzo: Laune, Humor, Ausgelassenheit. (Caprice, humour, exuberance.)

Finale: Übergang zur Resignation. Schmerzliches Entsagen. (Transition toward resignation. Most grievous renunciation.)

Sixteen years later Wagner expanded and moulded this outline into a colourful interpretation of the psychological content of the quartet, likening it to the innermost happenings in a day of Beethoven's life.

Although the two aforementioned listening approaches seem to be essentially different from each other, they are in fact basically complementary and reflect the intimate correlation between musical structure and expressive content. It is precisely the

Quartet No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131 (cont.)

structural perfection of this quartet that generates the depth and breadth of its expressiveness.

- Mieczyslaw Kolinski

THE ORFORD STRING QUARTET of the University of Toronto stands proudly among the world's top ten chamber music ensembles, a unit of impressive calibre, of truly great artistry. The Quartet is made up of four exceptional young Canadian musicians: violinists ANDREW DAWES and KENNETH PERKINS, violist TERENCE HELMER and cellist DENIS BROTT. It is a testament to the talent and dedication of each that when the Quartet performs, the individuals disappear and only their total merger into music remains. The Quartet grew out of Les Jeunesses Musicales summer camp at Mount Orford, Quebec. It is now a veteran of tour after tour - the length and breadth of Europe, Canada the United States, the U.S.S.R. and the Orient, often under the auspices of the Canada Council and the Department of External Affairs.

Next events: March 9 and 10, 1984, 8 p.m.
The Opera Division presents
'Sir John in Love', by R. Vaughan-Williams
MacMillan Theatre, \$8., Students, seniors \$5.
Box Office - 978-3744

Sunday, March 11, 3 p.m.
Helen Bowkun, piano
Walter Hall, free